

## 2009 YEAR END ACCOMPLISHMENT SUMMARY – DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)

**During the first year of the Obama administration, the Department of Veterans Affairs began transforming care and benefits to the nation's Veterans, while laying the organizational groundwork for further change in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.**

### **Investing in the Future through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)**

VA is helping stimulate the economy and enhance the Department's capacity to serve our Veterans by executing \$2.1 billion under ARRA spending, with 55 percent of the total funds obligated by December 1. Over 98 percent of VA contracts were competitively awarded, and awards to Veteran-Owned Small Businesses exceeded 77 percent. ARRA funds enabled VA to hire an additional 2,293 additional claims processors, issue over \$465 million in one-time payments to eligible Veterans, and commit \$400 million to energy and green initiatives. VA's ARRA program is wholly transparent, with every dollar spent posted and available on the Internet.

### **Educating the Next Generation of Veterans through the Post 9-11 GI Bill**

VA has provided over \$1.2 billion in tuition, housing and stipends necessary to keep student Veterans in school and continues to process approximately 5,000 claims for Post 9-11 GI Bill benefits daily. This next year VA will introduce an automated tool to fully replace the current manual enrollment and payment processing system for final rollout by 2011. VBA also launched the first *VetSuccess* on-campus initiative at the University of South Florida to provide integration support and assistance to GI Bill Veterans.

### **Serving Veterans Health Needs through Rural Health Initiatives**

To meet the needs of over 3 million Veterans enrollees in rural communities, VA awarded over \$200 million in Rural Health Initiative projects in 2009, an increase of over \$150 million from 2008. The Rural Health initiatives include mobile programs that will expand the VA's online health record initiative to enable Veterans to access and manage their healthcare plan from a laptop, cell phone, or other smart phone device.

### **Address Emerging Needs in Traumatic Brain Injury and Mental Health Care**

- VA hired over additional 1,000 mental health professionals in 2009 to expand its ability to conduct mental health screenings and provide treatment. Additionally, the total budget for the mental health program also has increased by \$288 million. VA fielded a new disability rating system to greatly improve how claims for Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) are evaluated.
- VBA initiated a rule change to relax the stressor proof requirement for Veterans who pursue a claim for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Service in a combat zone now suffices as evidence if PTSD is diagnosed.
- Over 400 military leaders, health care professionals and advocates attended the first ever National Joint DoD/VA Mental Health Summit in November that produced tangible steps to tackling mental health challenges such as TBI and PTSD facing both the military and Veterans.

- The new Veterans National Suicide Prevention hotline received over 185,000 calls and interrupted over 5200 potential suicides. The VA employee, who helped to develop the hotline, was recognized as the Federal Employee of the Year in 2009.

### **Ending Veteran Homelessness**

VA spent \$400 million on ending Veteran homelessness in 2009. More than 35,000 Veterans and more than 5,000 spouses and children were served by outreach initiatives for Homeless Veterans, a 15 percent increase from 2008. More than 8,300 Veterans are in permanent housing with dedicated case managers and access to high quality VA health care.

- To better understand the causes and potential coordinated efforts to end homelessness VA hosted a National Summit on Veteran Homelessness in the first week of November with over 1,200 attendees from across local, state, federal and the private sectors. VA also served as lead for the President's Interagency Council on Homelessness in 2009.

### **Making Groundbreaking Progress on Electronic Healthcare Records**

The VA's Virtual Lifelong Electronic Record (VLER) Initiative directed by the President in April made groundbreaking progress with the exchange of patient health care data between VA and its first private sector partner Kaiser Permanente in December. An additional pilot program is being planned for the spring, and preparations are underway for the DoD to join the Nationwide Health Information Network in 2010.

### **Leveraging Technology and Innovation to Reduce the Benefit Claims Backlog**

To speed the benefit claim process, on-line applications for initial benefits are now accepted for disability compensation through VBA's website and the requirement for a signed paper copy has been eliminated.

### **Expanding Vietnam Veterans Benefits for Agent Orange Exposure**

VA established a presumptive Service Connection for eligible Veterans for Agent Orange exposure with Hairy-cell leukemia and all other chronic B-cell leukemias; Parkinson's Disease, and Ischemic Heart Disease.

### **Providing Access for Priority Group 8 Veterans**

VA is expanding access to benefits for approximately 500,000 Veterans who were previously precluded from receiving benefits due to an income limits policy set in 2003. VA began registering Priority Group 8 Veterans in July of 2009, and expects to see over 250,000 enrollees by 2011.

### **Continuing the Nation's Lowest Foreclosure Rate through the Housing Loan Program**

Last year, VA managed approximately 1.3 million active home loans obtained through its Home Loan Guaranty Program. Despite problems in the nation's housing market, VA-backed mortgage loans had a lower foreclosure rate than any other type of home loan in the industry last fiscal year.

### **Expanding Access to Veterans Insurance and Housing Loan Services**

VA conducted a "Year One Review" of the Traumatic Injury Protection coverage under the Traumatic Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance Program (TSGLI), which resulted in expansion of the program to cover six new losses and liberalized eligibility for four additional conditions. An additional \$33 million in TSGLI benefits have been paid to seriously injured servicemembers and Veterans under the expansion.

### **Building Veterans Employment Initiatives**

In response to the President's Executive Order on the employment of Veterans in the federal Government, the Secretaries of VA and Labor co-chaired the first Intergovernmental Council on Veterans Employment which is leading to new initiatives for Veteran employment. Also this year, VA Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment career counseling, job training, and job placement services, assisted 8,238 disabled Veterans to obtain and maintain suitable jobs.

### **Creating Greater Communications and Transparency**

VA dramatically increased its communication methods with Veterans by re-launching a more dynamic and user-friendly website and establishing a new media presence on both Facebook and Twitter accounts to improve communication with our clients and stakeholders.

### **Rendering Honors at National Cemeteries**

In addition to the over 100,000 interments of eligible Veterans this past year, VA awarded 10 state grants for \$40 million to fund five new state Veteran cemeteries. Two new state Veteran cemeteries opened in Kansas (Ft. Riley) and Texas (Abilene). In 2009, five new federal Cemeteries were opened for a total construction cost of \$89.1 million.

### **Expanded the Disability Evaluation System Pilot Program**

VA successfully expanded the Disability Evaluation System (DES) pilot program to 21 sites. Both VA and DoD focus on a single separation examination and rating used by both agencies

### **Enlarging the Benefits at Discharge Program**

VA has expanded programs for separating servicemembers with the establishment of the Quick Start program for servicemembers with less than 60 days before separation. The average processing time for these claims was 95.5 days compared to the average processing of all other claims of 161 days.

### **Supporting the Customer Satisfaction Program**

In 2009, VA partnered with J.D. Power and Associates to develop a world class Voice of the Veteran (VOV) Satisfaction Survey Program as a means to receive client experience information that will assist its Veterans Benefits Administration to continuously improve the level of service.

### **Veterans Health Administration Receives the Baldrige Award**

In 2009, VHA won the Baldrige Award, America's highest honor for innovation and performance excellence, presented annually by the President. The award was based on medical research involving 90,000 patients, ultimately benefitting millions of Veterans and other Americans.

### **VA's Pharmacy Services Receives Two Customer Awards**

In 2009, J.D. Power and Associates recognized VA pharmacies with the highest customer satisfaction scores in a national sampling of pharmacy customers. VA also received an "Among the Best" ranking for the mail order category, the same overall ranking as Kaiser Permanente Pharmacy and Prescriptions Solutions.

### **Continuing New Construction**

VA awarded a total of 16 construction document awards of \$44.7 million, and 36 construction awards, totaling \$757.8 million for the construction of facilities and major renovations. Construction of five medical facilities was approved for a total construction cost of \$136.2 million.

### **Caring for Our Gulf War Veterans**

VA established a Gulf War Task Force to comprehensively review all aspects of the VA's care, benefits, and research into unexplained illnesses associated with our Gulf War Veterans.

### **Expanding Women Veteran Programs**

In 2009, the Veterans Health Administration initiated a national plan to implement comprehensive primary care for women at all facilities. VA also finalized the hiring and placement of all 144 full-time Women Veterans Program Managers. Over \$167 million was budgeted for Women Veteran programs in 2009.

- VA awarded the "Create Women's Clinic" project in 2009 utilizing ARRA funding. Under this project, an existing Clinic will be remodeled in 2010, and serve as both a design and functional model for other clinics across the country.

### **Meeting VA's Emergency Preparedness Needs**

VA established an Integrated Operations Center to coordinate and execute a range of emergency preparedness and response plans, including monitoring and supporting H1N1 crisis activity.

### **Establishing Management and Performance Accountability**

VA established a comprehensive Senior Leader Management Program, as well as a Corporate Senior Executive Service (SES) Management Office, to improve standardization and transparency in all SES management activity. VA is creating and enforcing clearer and more consistent standards of performance and accountability.

### **Supporting Minority Veterans**

VA conducted numerous training events, including the 10<sup>th</sup> biennial Minority Veterans Program Coordinators (MVPC) conference, to train, educate and equip MVPCs to enhance their outreach efforts to better serve minority Veterans. VA began providing one-time payment of benefits totaling over \$135 million to over 11,357 eligible World War II Filipino veterans.

### **Overview of VA Services and Care in 2009**

- \$40.7 billion in disability and compensation benefits, \$4.1 billion in pension payments
- 106,360 interments in our 130 National Cemeteries
- 5.7 million Veterans receiving health care.